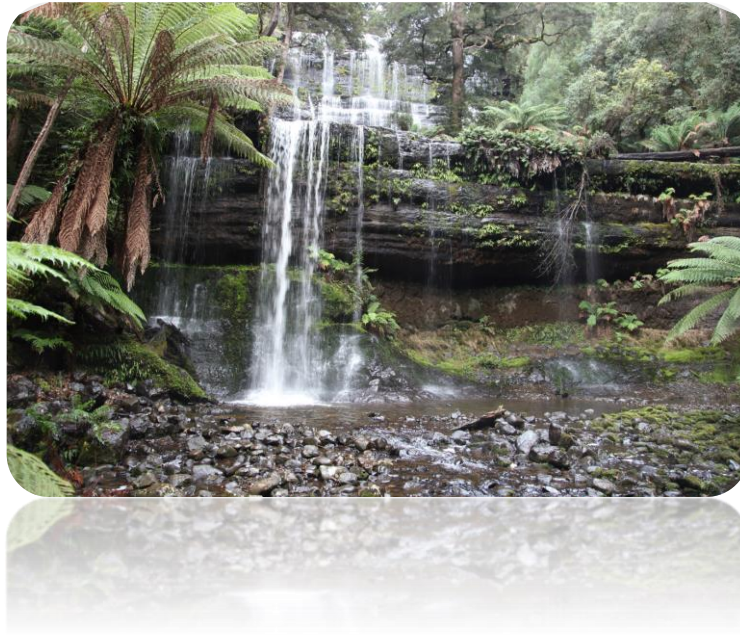


# Tasmania: Mount Field NP to St Helens

## Stage 3 May 2018

Up until now we had travelled in places which were relatively new to us. The Tarkine was certainly new territory as was the trip over from Strahan to Hamilton. We had a bit of damp weather but overall it was sunny and cool. We had always keenly anticipated the Eastern and Midland areas so this next stretch of travel enabled us to put places to the names.



Russell Falls, Mt Field NP

## **T**assie Camps

This stage started on 10 May .

After the drive from Brady's Lake, we pulled into a nice camp on the river at Hamilton, a small town about an hour out of Hobart. In the three days we spent here we did some housekeeping but also scampered around and looked at nearby places. Although Hamilton is quite small, it is a town full of heritage listed cottages and buildings. There is a very English feel to the place and the green fields added to that impression. Our camp here was quite pleasant and we enjoyed peaceful days and nights. I am told that in Summer it can get very busy and it would certainly not appeal to me on that basis. There was an interesting multi-stage geocache here as well, where we had to get the detail from several different heritage cottages' plaques to give us the final clue. That one took an hour or two to complete but was very satisfying.

The campsite at Hamilton was \$5 a night by permit and there is camping beside the pretty river, and access to showers and toilets. A pub is within walking distance and the small town centre is not

far away.

We did a day trip over to New Norfolk to do some grocery shopping and check out the caravan park there as we thought we might base ourselves there to visit nearby Hobart. New Norfolk is another delightful town and has much to offer. I loved the old buildings here, but hey, every Tasmanian town seems to have old and beautiful buildings.

But in the meantime it became clear that bad weather was brewing, and we had to re-think our plans. The caravan park at New Norfolk is beside the Derwent and it floods easily...

After Hamilton we instead turned slightly back Southwards to the nearby Mt Field National Park, and we are so glad we did. This area deserves to be a destination in its own right, with incredible scenery. I would think the hills and lakes at Strathgordon and Lake Pedder are among the most scenic areas in the state.

Anyway, I anticipate slightly. There is a national park campground at Mt Field NP but it was on low-lying ground so we instead chose the campground at 'Left of Field' about a kilometer away. We went onto a powered site due to the bad weather, and realised we would need to sit out the rain that was coming. Hobart, only 73 kms away suffered a drenching with 105 mls of rain overnight and was flooded. But we only had about 40 mls over the several days we were there and although it was a bit soggy it wasn't too bad.

The day we chose to drive over to Strathgordon (the site of the dam) was mostly sunny and although freezing cold, it was a lovely day. The Gordon Dam, also known as the Gordon River Dam, is a major gated double curvature concrete arch dam with a controlled spillway across the Gordon River. The impounded reservoir is called Lake Gordon.



The dam was constructed in 1974 by the Hydro Electric Corporation (TAS) for the purpose of generating hydro-electric power via the conventional Gordon Power Station located below the dam wall. Both the dam and the lake are so very impressive and have to be seen to be believed. You can climb down some stairs and walk across the top of the dam wall pictured above but I was not that energetic.

We realised at some point during our visit out here that there was a nice restaurant back at Strathgordon and so we called in there on our way back and had a lovely lunch with a view of Lake Pedder.



← This was our view while having lunch...

There are two campgrounds over here which would be nice in fine weather (Ted's Beach and Serpentine) but this was not the weather for it. Probably in a day or two things would be different.

Eventually, the wet weather dried up and the sun came out on our last day here. I had taken some great photos at Russell Falls earlier in our stay and thought I would get some new ones while the falls were in full spate, but alas the mist was so great I had to give that up as a bad joke. But we were impressed with the Falls all the same and thought the area around the town of National Park was just lovely. (Yes, the name of the town is 'National Park').

So after our several days here we pulled out and first headed to new Norfolk and then further North to Kempton, a small town on the Midland Highway. This lovely little town is quite small but has a whiskey distillery (really!) together with a restaurant, and a nice tavern. There is also a nice by-donation camp which has water taps and four power outlets, with a recommended price of \$10 a day. We stayed the 48 hours allowed.

We had dinner at the tavern as it was Mothers Day, and the next day did a day trip to Hobart, as we needed to buy a new headlight for the car. We had a great day in Hobart with a visit to

Constitution Dock and a chocolate shop right where we had parked. And to cap it off, the icebreaker ship Aurora Australis was in port. It looks so impressive...



There is a tourist precinct in a big warehouse on the Dock and we had a nice coffee and morning tea there.

On our way back to the van at Kempton we called in and saw Richmond (we had stayed there on a previous visit to Tasmania) and enjoyed a round trip through the countryside in brilliant sun.

After Kempton, we drove further North up the Midland Highway and picked the town of Campbell Town to stay at. There is free camping allowed at the village green, near the famous Red Bridge



### *The Red Bridge*

The Red Bridge crosses the Elizabeth River at the edge of Campbell Town. Built in 1838 using penal labour, it is the oldest surviving brick arch bridge in Australia. It is also the oldest bridge anywhere on the Australian National Highway. The bridge contains three arch spans of 7.6 m (25 ft) each and holds two lanes of traffic as well as pedestrian walkways. It lies on the Midland Highway, roughly halfway between Hobart and Launceston, carrying over two million vehicles per year.

It is said to have been designed by James Blackburn, architect to Melbourne city and a convict himself. It was constructed of 1,250,000 handmade bricks on dry land, and after its completion

the river was diverted to flow under the bridge. It is a sobering thought that it was built for horse and cart and now has big trucks thundering across it all these years later.

We experienced a significant frost here at Campbell Town and the car was covered with ice. I am so glad of that diesel heater...

From Campbell Town we headed North and re-visited Old Macs Farm at Launceston, staying a couple of nights in order to get washing done and fill up the water tanks. The washing is a necessary evil and is probably the only real issue which takes us to a powered site as a rule (other than extreme weather. But we enjoyed sunny weather at Launceston and so were able to stay off

power for a bit longer. The second morning we had a heavy fog and I captured some atmospheric shots before the sun was back out in full force.



On one of these two days we spent a day exploring the Tamar wineries and what a lovely day it was. We bought a couple of bottles of something special at Jansz to take home, and did the same at Providence Winery.

Our friends Bernie and Carol were further North at a spot which sounded great; Garden Island. It is not an island and it is certainly not a garden either, but rather an area of reclaimed land near Beaconsfield. We decided to join them for a few days and drove up to this great camp, right on the Tamar River, a coastal area.

### **Garden Island**

S41 6 39 E146 48 15

This was a magic spot to spend a few days while just relaxing and enjoying the scenery outside our van window and also having a look around the area. We had a great view from our van lounge, of water, birds and passing ships. And the days continued to be sunny. But oh, the wind! It remained windy up until the day we left, after four lovely days here. And the icing on the cake was spending each afternoon with Carol and Bernie over a drink or cup of coffee.



## **Ransons Beach, Waterhouse Conservation Park**

S 40 50 25 E147 41 16

What can I say...this has to be one of the most spectacular spots we have ever stayed at. (Mind you, I do keep saying this...but I have added to my list of favourite camps of all time by staying at this spot)

Accessed from the Bridport Road which goes East of the small town of Bridport and on to the coast, and then 12 kms in on a bumpy, corrugated gravel road, is a series of lovely camps sites in the park. On our first night we stayed at the more easily accessed Village Green camp and thought it was lovely, being protected from the wind. But on a drive around we soon discovered the jewel of a camp over at nearby Ranson's Beach. I could not believe the best camp site was empty (there were very few people around in the whole park) and we quickly decamped and moved over to the new camp.



Our van sat in isolated splendour above a sweep of pristine white beach, and with a view to die for. What a magnificent place! The weather was perfect too; cool and sunny days and no wind.

We spent four lovely days there and found it hard to leave. But as I was rostered on to work on the Monday, we packed up on Sunday and pulled out.

Our route South East took us through a backroad of gravel and with pine forest and creeks alongside the road most of the way. Eventually we found ourselves heading into a higher altitude via winding roads and then emerged over the other side of a range and toward the coast.

We called into Pyengana Cheese factory and café and had lunch there together with a host of other folk who also thought it was a great spot. The shop has an attached café where you can buy lunch or enjoy a coffee...and they have a range of ciders. Naturally we had coffee and lunch, and the milk in my coffee came from one of those cows in the field!

## **St Helens**

This town is popular with tourists who come for the scenic beauty along the coast, and the lovely campsites. It is not a big town but has a breathtaking harbour, and a host of coffee shops and a

couple of supermarkets, making it a perfect spot for campers. We stayed at the caravan park, having successfully won a travel auction some time before. The good news is it was very cheap...the bad news is the park was also cheap and verging on nasty. It was very basic and we would not normally stay in such a place but it served a purpose, which was to do washing and get some chores done like cleaning the van and car. And as I was working this week it was handy to have a base to come back to each night and with power. Our next destination was a superb place and one which we moved to on the Friday morning...leaving the caravan park behind happily. We had checked out Swimcart Beach from St Helens and headed out there secure in the knowledge it wasn't too busy. That was one of the advantages of travelling in the off season. Swimcart Beach was one of the most delightful places I have EVER camped. See the next trip report....